



MORAGA 2023-2031 HOUSING ELEMENT

APPENDIX E HOUSING SITE “BALANCING ACT” SURVEY

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Introduction

The Town of Moraga was one of 25 Bay Area jurisdictions that received a grant from the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) for a license to use “Balancing Act” software. Balancing Act is an on-line application that enables users to allocate a community’s regional housing needs allocation (RHNA) to different properties or sub-areas. It was designed to be a fun and engaging simulation “game” that challenged residents to determine how and where each jurisdiction should meet its housing assignment for 2023-2031. The neighboring cities of Lafayette and Orinda also used the Balancing Act program.

The Town launched its version of the program on March 7, 2022 and kept it operational through May 10, 2022. The Balancing Act page was visited more than 1,000 times during this period and 108 users submitted on-line maps. Use of the Balancing Act tool was promoted through the About Town newsletter, the Town’s electronic message board, a pop-up event at the Farmers Market, and several meetings with civic organizations. The Town also hosted a walking tour to familiarize residents with the Balancing Act opportunity sites and convened two workshops (one in person and one on-line) to engage the public in the site selection exercise. In addition, the Balancing Act tool was promoted through word of mouth and announced at several Town Council and Planning Commission meetings.

How it Works

Moraga’s Regional Housing Needs Allocation for 2023-2031 is 1,118 units. This total is divided into four income categories: above moderate, moderate, low, and very low. The “above moderate” need is generally associated with single family housing. The Town determined that it already had sufficient capacity to meet its above moderate assignment but needed to rezone additional land to meet its moderate, low, and very low-income targets. These targets are typically met on sites zoned for multi-family housing. The Town determined that it needed adequate sites to accommodate 800 multi-family units during the planning period. This includes the “base” assignment plus a buffer in the event some of the sites become unavailable.

Some of the 800-unit capacity already exists (based on current zoning) and some of it requires rezoning property to allow higher density housing. The Town did not differentiate between multi-family zoned sites and sites needing rezoning, but simply asked the question “where would you put 800 units of multi-family housing in Moraga”? The Town narrowed the field of possible answers by focusing the choices entirely on the Town’s two commercial districts: Moraga Center and the Rheem Center. The former area is approximately 190 acres and is governed by a Specific

Plan adopted in 2010. The latter area is approximately 70 acres and is largely zoned for commercial uses, with no current allowances for housing. However, Town policy has been to support housing in this area, and to prepare a Specific Plan that provides greater land use and development guidance.

Both the Moraga Center and Rheem Center have distinctive subareas, largely defined by roads and natural features such as Laguna Creek. For the Balancing Act app, the Moraga Center was divided into seven subareas and the Rheem Center was divided into four subareas. In other words, users of Balancing Act were tasked with allocating 800 units to 11 subareas using an on-line map.

When opening the program, a map appears on the screen showing the location of the 11 subareas. App users are invited to click on an icon next to each area to learn more about where it is, what currently exists, and what zoning changes would be needed to add housing. App users can then point and click on each of the 11 subareas and use “plus” and “minus” tools to add housing units to each area until they reach 800 units. The number of units that can be assigned to each subarea is capped to avoid putting all the units in one zone. Once a player reaches 800 units, they receive the message “You Have a Housing Plan!” and may submit their map. The site also had images from similar jurisdictions showing what various densities look like.

The Balancing Act program includes opportunities for users to submit written comments along with their maps. Comments may be provided for the exercise as a whole, or on individual sites or areas on the map. About half of those using the app submitted comments.

A map of the 11 subareas is included on the following page. Table 1 shows the average number of units assigned to each subarea by the public. Table 2 shows the “realistic capacity” estimates for the 11 subareas that were developed by staff and included in the March 2 staff report to the Town Council and Planning Commission.

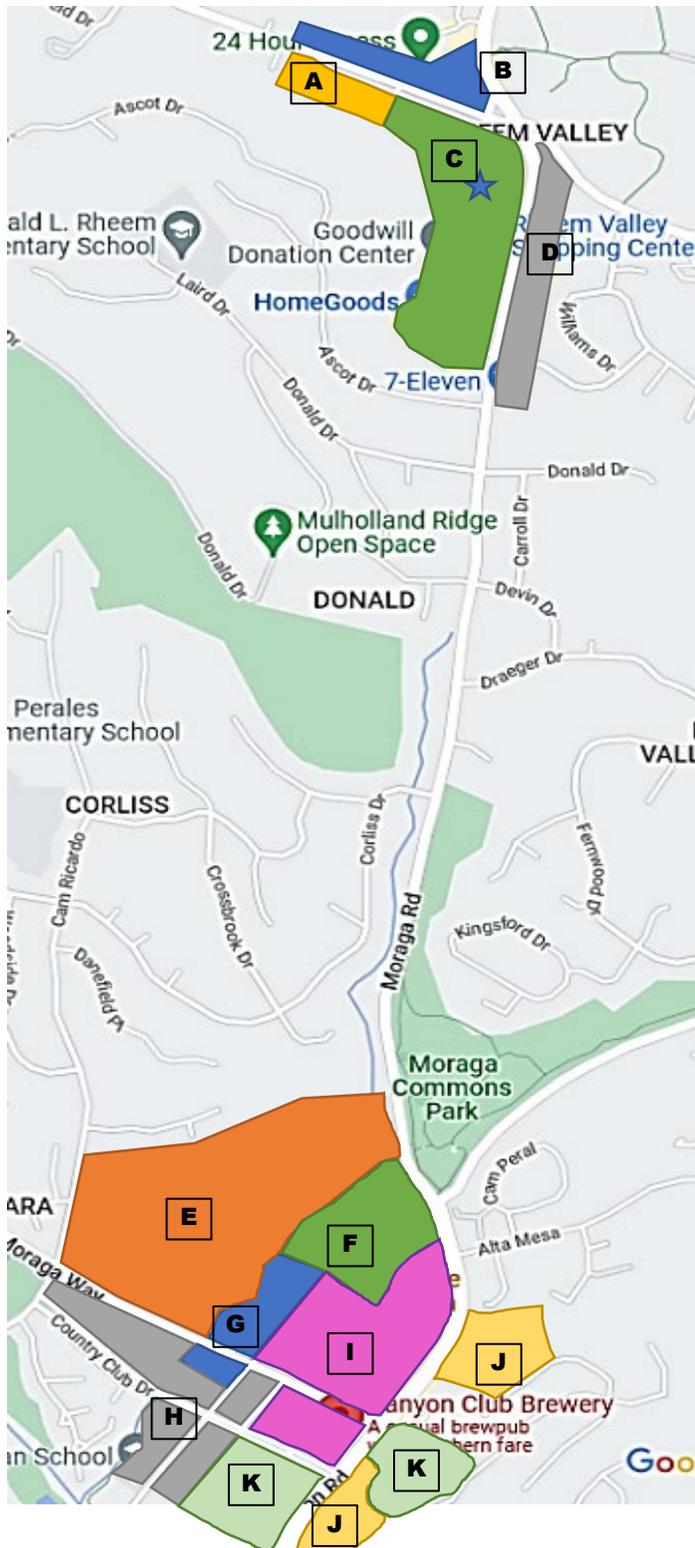


Table 1: Balancing Act unit counts

Area	Average from 108 submittals	Average from 5 small groups at Workshops (25 attendees)
A	81	68
B	83	108
C	158	172
D	38	28
E	116	172
F	111	198
G	60	60
H	27	44
I	93	58
J	44	10
K	--	--
Total	807	918
Rheem	44%	41%
MCSP	56%	59%

Table 2: Consultant-Generated Estimates of “Realistic Capacity”¹

Area	Units
A	82
B	160
C	160
D	28
E	366
F	230
G	40
H	142
I	84
J	0
K	N/A(*)
Total	1,132
Rheem	24%
MCSP	76%

(*) There are 156 units located in Area K in the pre-application phase. No additional potential exists.

¹ The figures in Table 2 reflect staff’s February 2022 assessment of each area using metrics such as vacant land, the assessed value of improvements on each site, and the square footage of building space relative to what is allowed by zoning.

Table 3: Mean vs Median Number of Units Assigned by Balancing Act Users

Area	Mean (average)	Median
A	81	90
B	83	80
C	158	150
D	38	50
E	116	100
F	111	100
G	60	50
H	27	50
I	93	80
J	44	50
K	--	--
Total	807	800
<i>Rheem</i>	44%	46%
<i>MCSP</i>	56%	54%

Table 3 (above) shows the mean vs median number of units assigned to each subarea in the app. In some respects, the median provides a better indicator of the results. This is because some users of the app loaded their units heavily into some areas while leaving others with zero units or very few units. This tended to skew the averages a bit. The mean and median are fairly close in most cases. The greatest differences are in areas D and H. In the case of Area H, a number of submittals showed “zero” units and added text urging the Town to look elsewhere. These responses cited traffic and noise concerns along School Street and the adjacent residential neighborhood.

Overall, the split between the Moraga Center and School Street areas was roughly 55/45 (55% of units in Moraga Center and 45% in Rheem). The share assigned to Rheem was significantly larger than what staff had anticipated, particularly since the area is less than half as large. On the other hand, the Moraga Center share excludes 156 units in Area “K” which were in the pre-application stage at the time the app was rolled out.² Adding these units to the total, the split is 63/37 (Moraga Center/Rheem Center).

² Area K is commonly referred to as MCSP Area 14 and Area 15. Two projects (123 units and 33 units) were in the pre-app stage at the time the Balancing Act program was run. Neither of these projects is currently active.

As shown in Table 2, the consultant team developed estimates of how the units might be allocated prior to the launch of Balancing Act. Relative to these estimates, the public put far fewer units in Area “E”, which is the 40+ acre orchard in the MCSP area west of Laguna Creek. The internal estimate for this area was 366 units, but the public responses only favored 100-120 units here. It is worth noting that much of this area had already been assigned high-density multi-family zoning (20 units/acre) in 2010 and is envisioned as an area for senior housing, townhomes, and apartments. Likewise, the public assigned less housing to Area “F” than the consulting team estimates (about 100-110 units in most submittals, compared to double that in the staff estimates). This also is an area that is currently zoned for higher density housing. The project team also estimated substantially more capacity in Area H than was supported by the public—again, another area currently zoned for higher densities.

Conversely, the public favored substantially more housing at the Rheem Shopping Center than was estimated by the project team. The team’s estimate for the entire Rheem area was 270 units. The median number of units assigned by the public to this area was 320. The public also assigned more units to Area J in the MCSP and tended to favor housing in Area G. Some of the written commentary and workshop feedback suggested that housing be allowed in the Moraga Ranch area, and that housing be sited on the RV storage area north of the Ranch property.

Ultimately, the feedback provided by the public was used to shape the identification of housing sites and the decisions about which sites to rezone. As a result of public input, a greater emphasis was placed on sites in the Rheem Center than was initially proposed. The initial proposal to increase density from 20 units to 24 units per acre in the MCSP orchard area east of Laguna Creek was reduced in scope to only apply to the R-20A parcel (not the R-20B parcel). Further discussions with the Town Council, Planning Commission, and public resulted in the elimination of housing sites in much of Area I and all of Area G. The northern part of Area J was also added as a housing site in response to public comment.

Verbatim Comments submitted with maps

- We should maximize the usage of core Moraga Center (mixed use housing above retail) AND Rheem Center BEFORE we go tearing up hillsides and openspace
- I would like the Rheem Area developed for retail and housing. The land at Rheem is flat and has 3 possible exits from town. I think this would make this town a college town.
- Put more housing in existing commercial areas and not block scenic corridors and ridgelines.
- Build as many units as possible in Zones A, B, C, and D to keep traffic to a minimum in Moraga. Additional required units can be built in Zones J and K which, although deeper into Moraga and adding traffic because people have to leave, the units are at least on the perimeter and don't create congestion in the Safety/town center.
- What a challenge and what a picture of how the Town will look if it comes to be.
- The thought of this makes me ill. This many additional units is a disaster. There are so many example of horrible unintended consequences of government housing projects--such as redevelopment, etc. I fear this will be one of them. Especially horrible for traffic and a disaster in a fire or other emergency. I'm horrified if even half of the required units are developed!
- Town should resist as much as possible, then concentrate new units to avoid what happen in other cities, first one or two apartment houses, then more and eventually single family neighborhood lost. People who have homes here want to preserve the low crime low density good schools etc. that brought them here. High density housing is in every way the opposite of that. Do as little as possible as slowly as possible. Minimum compliance. Go on record against this and other state laws, ABAG rules that seek to destroy single family housing.
- If you can't count the parcel with 130 or so already allocated, the plan I propose increases density to a breaking point. If they are allowed, a scaled back version would work better. We have plenty of available space to accommodate a total of 800.
- Concentrate the housing and drive better commercial activity, restaurants and a center of gravity in Rheem because there are plenty of public transport options.
- I live near the Moraga Center Northwest area, I think affordable housing is a very important issue that should be stressed in the community, as the town of Moraga has a duty to assist in the housing crisis throughout the Bay Area and United States as a whole.
- I sure wish you had more variety of housing - smaller units - some only one story
- Additional units are a severe fire hazard. Very unsafe in an emergency. Insane.
- The clustering in the two central areas makes sense. Need more? Ranch is best due to location near shopping, transit in 2 directions and recreation.
- Let's create visually appealing high density housing. What is here currently is so depressing. It's unclear whether any repurposing of commercial land will become mixed use. I know it is for the Moraga Specific Plan, but what about the Rheem area? Will any displaced schools be offered new space? These specialty private schools very much contribute to Moraga being a destination. What is happening with the space off Bollinger Canyon? This should be included as options
- I don't think our town can support all this additional housing. With only 3 main ways to get out of town two of which have high schools on them that make traffic insane during school drop off pick up times. An additional 1500+ cars traveling at that time means roadway improvements need to be made first. 2 lanes roads are needed to get out of town. Also concerned that housing in the shopping areas will really effect parking, yes some can be removed but not all. We moved to Moraga for smaller town living and not to become Lafayette or city living.

- Hi: I was disappointed to see that all your housing examples are for single use housing. Can we consider more mixed use housing with shops on the ground floor and housing above. Ideally 3-5 stories in height with underground parking, or a level dedicated to parking. More like the Emeryville development and every other cute city in Europe. Let’s make a walkable community and build on top of Safeway! I want my kids to be able to move back home. We need places for city staff and teachers to live in this community. Let’s get housing costs and rental rates down. - 30 year Moraga resident, Campo class of 1990.
- I hope I am not a resident of Moraga when all of this is completed! Too much congestion for the roads.
- Stay away from hillside areas, commercial to mix-use, office to residential. Rheem redevelopment to create better walkability a town center feel.
- I focused units on flat land, mostly where I have heard indications that the property owner might be interested in developing/redeveloping housing. Given that I heard that Area E cannot be developed at the highest densities already in the MCSP, I did not assign any of our 800 MF units there.
- Sites to consider for 3 story buildings: Site D's vacant lot and site A's vacant lot - Both have a high hillside at the back of the property so a taller building would look suitable.
- The housing element housing should not be built close to a location with current single family housing such as the School Street location. Instead it should be built near the commercial/retail areas of town. School Street is already a heavily traveled street due to drop off and pick up of students at Saklan School, the use of the trail head next to the Serbian Church, JM students who bike and walk to school and use the pathway at the end of School Street, parents who pick up their JM children in cars at the end of School street, commuters who take School street to De La Cruz to access Canyon Rd and/or Moraga Way to avoid the traffic lights and congestion on Moraga Rd and the seniors from the two senior centers who walk on School Street. For all of these reasons the development that is likely to go in on Country Club drive should also not be allowed to have an exit onto School Street which would be right next to Saklan School where there is a lot of traffic and children.
- Good luck!
- BUILD MORE HOUSING!!! STOP NIMBYS!!!
- PLEASE PLEASE do not ruin our existing School St neighborhood with traffic and parking. Peak times load our street with cars for school pickup and drop off, pedestrian access to trail and schools and churches and events and cafes already. We have overflow parking in front of homes already. Kids on foot and bikes use this as a major route to and from schools (JM and Saklan). Please protect existing residential areas. Please help your existing community too.
- As you build out our town PLEASE be mindful that we're in a fire hazard area with limited ways to leave our community. Widen Moraga Way? Rheem Blvd? Canyon?
- How will we handle the increased car load on our congested streets? how will these added cars affect our ability to evacuate in case of fire?
- Please consider that The School St area is already impacted with traffic and parking from the Saklan School and the traffic from JM commuters.
- There are only two roads leaving Moraga (to Lafayette and Orinda), and these two roads are VERY congested in rush hours. Therefore, retirement housing for seniors is the ONLY option. It will not increase the congestion in the roads. Question: Can Valle Vista area be used for extra housing?
- This too many units for Moraga. The construction traffic and noise will last for years. It is already very difficult to get out of Moraga at many times during the day. Adding this many units puts our

lives at risk in the event of a fire. I can't imagine the fire department thinks this is a good idea. Please value the lives of current Moraga residents and their children over possible future residents. Thank you.

- Very concerned about emergency evacuations and overloaded schools and town services Way too many units.
- My main concern is the impact on schools and number of additional teachers and resources that will be needed to accommodate the additional influx of new students.
- Adding these homes will ruin the character, livability and quality of life in Moraga. The City should be legally fighting this requirement from the State
- Thanks for incorporating our feedback. I hope local amenities (restaurants, grocery stores, bakeries, cafe's, etc.) at Moraga shops are improved to meet the needs of a growing population; amenities in Moraga have been sub par for far too long.
- I am writing this for my dad who is in his 90's and has been a long time home owner in Moraga. He doesn't think any of the high density housing should butt up against single family neighborhoods so the majority of it should be In the commercial area near Safeway and the commercial area near Rheem. He thinks exiting Moraga if there is an emergency will be very difficult and that it is a life safety hazard over building in Moraga like this. There is a lot of open space in Moraga and a lot of land owned by the town. You said you were going to spread out housing so it's not all in one area, but we only see two areas on the map where you show development. Please do a new map that shows land owned by town or individuals who wish to develop their land to spread housing around and not just in these two areas.
- While I understand the need for more housing, I do not believe our roads can accommodate this level of development. The current residents are already struggling, especially during morning and afternoon school hours. If there were a need for a mass evacuation (i.e. fire), there would be serious issues. 800 more units would cause a massive increase in traffic and safety concerns that could not be managed with our current road structure. I do believe most development should revolve around the 2 shopping centers so people can walk to services and hopefully keep a certain amount of cars off the road. Development that butts up against current single family neighborhoods should be kept to a minimum to preserve the character of those neighborhoods.
- Unsafe for fire evacuation, limited resources for emergency services, schools in neighborhoods, traffic will get worse ,schools maxed out for enrollment, not enough jobs for population moving in thus traffic congestion, potential employees living outside Moraga will not be willing to come here for employment. Basically more people with less services.
- Thanks for letting the public participate
- Building up commercial zones with mixed residential and commercial will bring a unique element and promote quality retail tenants vs the vacancies experienced currently.
- It would seem easier and more sustainable to build multifamily units along access routes and within retail infrastructure than up a hill on undeveloped land that would be more suitable for the single family homes that already dot our landscape. Developing the mixed retail and multifamily residential along flat ground will bring a certain centricity to the town vs spread out on section E
- I'd like to see some nice but even a bit higher density / smaller unit options - maybe closest to / in the shopping centers - then also some that are less dense. Not everyone has the same need or desire for space. And, smaller units would be more affordable for those who need it. Variety will also be more appealing looking. This was a bit hard to convey as presented as I also don't want to encourage a bunch of demolition. I'd prefer focus on the available spaces (especially excess parking lots) / vacant

buildings within these largely defined areas to the extent possible. That meant putting more modestly sized projects in most of the areas.

- I am concerned about fire safety with this development given limited roads that exit out of Moraga.
- Rheem seems to be the ideal area of multiple access points to connecting roads and great access to St. Mary's College for great student / faculty / staff housing. It would be so nice to have a college center for living in the middle of a commerce area
- My preference is to build "up" in Rheem Center - residential above commercial/retail on ground floor.
- Increase student housing at SMC and find assisted living facilities that might want to build in Moraga. Perhaps the Town Council can provide these organizations with some type of creative incentives to bring them here. These will add many new "units" without substantive strain on our schools and roadways. 800 families will greatly strain our schools. 800 families will greatly increase traffic and will make emergency fire evacuation impossible. Before building these units, we MUST insist that any developers pay for expanded roadways to ensure that emergency fire evacuation is possible. Lastly, if there is any land on the other side of the Canyon Bridge that is part of the town of Moraga then we should propose units there.
- I love the Rheem area and would love to see the area developed well!
- The back side of town can use revitalization and there is more infrastructure there to support a community, like Safeway and banks.
- Concerned about how elementary and middle schools will be able to absorb the add'l children. Looks like Rheem & LP will be the 2 schools receiving all of the new kids. Is there a thought to having some of the Moraga Center kids (where there is the biggest amount of housing opportunity) go to CP?
- Very efficient tool to get the community involved.
- Overall concerns still include safe access and egress in and out of Moraga in case of an emergency, parking, and public transportation options to limit traffic.
- There needs to be more housing for students and housing that is affordable for them too. Students have to basically fight for housing off campus and in seeing that we are major contributors to the city of Moraga, that is majorly unfair.
- Good luck with this - messaging seems crucial, that the Town is not a builder, and these changes would happen over time, when a developer is interested.